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Philosophy of Education

EDU 402

Throughout my four years at UMF my philosophy of education has continually changed based on newly acquired knowledge, my experience in the field, and from my growth as an individual. I have faced many struggles and hardships during my time at UMF that have pushed me to the point of throwing in the towel and walking away from everything I have already accomplished. Each hardship has made me a more humble individual and an overall stronger learner. During my darkest hours, speaking specifically to this school year, I have found myself turning to my faith for strength to continue moving on. The verse of scripture from the Bible that I hold with me most tightly comes from the teachings of Jesus Christ, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8) As my time at UMF draws to a close in the coming year, I will continue to reflect upon my philosophy of education and I will carry it with me into my future career.

As a future social sciences teacher it is my biggest hope that I can show students the importance of a social studies education in high school and remove all of the rumors of social studies courses being "uninteresting, boring, and weak." Students who have no interest in learning about history, geography, economics, civics, and politics lose a lot of opportunities to gain knowledge about how our country and the world around us is operating. They miss being able to take historical events and compare them to the world they are living in during the present day. Social sciences are an opportunity for students to grow as individuals and it more importantly prepares them for life after school.

When I first arrived at UMF there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to teach high school students. I wanted to be just like my social studies teachers' who gave me such a strong interest in history and the other social sciences. Two events have caused me to rethink my position, first my experiences freshman year mentoring middle school students at Mt. Blue was a huge success and helped change my thoughts on whether or not I could handle teaching in a younger-aged student setting. Secondly, I put myself in the position of having to push back my student teaching experiences for several reasons, allowing myself an additional semester to continue my learning and preparation. I believe this is an opportunity to take courses that will better prepare me and more importantly certify me to teach in middle school classrooms. I learned a lot from my in-field practicum experiences at Mt. Blue High School, but I have a yearning desire to increase my knowledge in the middle level field and now have an opportunity.

As far back as I can remember, the expectations of the educational system for the students continually improved on my way through middle school into high school. It was unfortunate that I would be placed at a disadvantage heading into high school because I attended a Christian academy school where expectations for students were not high at all. Class sizes were under ten students from grades K-12 and many students had parents or guardians working as teachers or staff members at the school. It seemed that many students were able to coast by just because who their parents were. Most of the time, students would get away with playing games in the computer lab instead of attending classes, and because the school grounds were so large and spread out it was not difficult for students to get out of sight and escape class without any repercussions. Transitioning back into public school for high school was much more difficult academically than socially. I was placed in an applied algebra class, as well as the lowest level classes for both science and history. Over the course of my high school career, and a new raised expectation for education, I was able to move up to more advanced classes by my junior and senior year.

The expectations from my parents for my education were very high. The biggest reason being that I lived in a home in which having a good education was placed at high value. My mother has been teaching for many years, beginning as an Ed. Tech at an elementary school near the town I lived in, and she always made a point to keep track of how I was doing in school and always making sure I was getting the best education that I could be getting. Now she is happily teaching fifth grade at a small private school. My parents also always made it a point to attend anything and everything that I was a part of at school from National Honor Society down to each and every one of my teacher conferences. As for myself, I always cared strongly about being successful in school because I enjoyed being there. I enjoyed all aspects of school, the social aspects as well as the educational. I always put forth my best effort in classes because I was brought up with the mindset that it was important to be successful in school, not to mention that almost all of my friends had very similar attitudes towards school.

One of my more memorable experiences of this school year would have to be the research conducted by myself and group members on the educational issue of alternative schools. We took it upon ourselves to actually go and visit a "non-traditional" school for an entire day. The school was Harpswell Coastal Academy, and both the students and faculty were much more inviting to us than expected. It was a great opportunity for our group to get field experience at an alternative school. We learned that HCA has only six faculty members, none of which are custodial staff, and less than sixty students. Though those numbers will increase over the coming years as HCA earns more recognition by parents in the community, it was amazing how they were able to keep such a structured school system that actually worked. Students were split into two divisions comprised of sixth graders and ninth graders. The older students take it upon themselves to prepare the cafeteria everyday, prepare the food that is delivered daily, and then furthermore serve the food to the student body and staff before finally getting the opportunity to eat themselves. Then, following meals, they begin cleaning up the cafeteria; all students pitch in for this process. Some students mopped floors, some washed bathrooms, others took out the garbage and dumped food scraps in their own built compost pile. The positive attitudes by each student to accept the responsibility of taking care of their school were amazing. It also helps build skills that some students don't get when attending a traditional school with a full faculty, custodial staff, and cafeteria staff.

At HCA, there is also a large focus on creating a positive learning environment so that all students feel involved and engaged, that corresponds to behaviorism.  The teachers at HCA also put a large emphasis on connecting with their students and making sure that the students all feel as though they are a part of this school community.  In order to do this, they participate in CORE several times a week, where they talk about their lives and do personalized check-ins with one specific teacher, which emphasizes the bond between teacher and student. After our day at HCA and our research was complete I had a completely new outlook on project-based learning, which was a huge part of the educational experience at HCA. Seeing students given the opportunity to actually go visit a local farm and learn about the carbon cycle was a really great experience. They got to meet a real-life farmer and hear him explain the importance of soil on a farm and how to properly take care of animals and homegrown foods. The students were then given the second-half of the time spent on the farm to roam around freely by themselves, with a peer, or with the group as a whole. The students were also able to bring their person iPads with them in which the teacher had posted a worksheet on a wireless app in which students could access while off of wifi. Instead of giving the students basic questions about what they had experienced, the worksheet asked students to go above and beyond and draw on the screen what they were seeing, what the carbon cycle looks like on a farm, while also giving them the freedom to express how they really felt about their experience on the farm.

My experiences at HCA also helped influence which school of philosophy I am more drawn towards. I believe that each of the four schools of philosophy deserve to be apart of the classroom as they provide different beliefs and strategies that focus on expanding students' knowledge and understanding. The philosophy that I associated most with before my experiences at HCA and what I learned this school year would have to be idealism. Since pragmatism has aspects of idealism within itself, I would say that I am most drawn towards a more pragmatist view as my philosophy as of now. I believe that the classroom should involve experiences that are learner-centered. It is important to consider the diversity within each community and classroom within the school and remembering to prioritize inclusion is key to a positive learning experience for all. I want my classroom to be a place in which students feel comfortable to approach me when they need help, but also independent enough that I do not necessarily have to help them with everything that they accomplish. By giving students independence I believe they will find more gratitude and pride in their work.

I know based on my experience at UMF and where my education has brought me thus far, I am familiar with the essentialist belief and I agree with many of the qualities that support it. I have been a part of this philosophy throughout all my schooling. It was always the main focus of my schools to make sure that students were receiving this "common core" of education, but I have come to realize that this is not entirely how I feel. I am also leaning towards the beliefs of constructivism. After my experiences visiting a school that focuses on in-field experiences, I really saw the benefits of project-based learning and hands-on activities that stimulate student learning. As my dislike of standardized testing continues to grow, I am more and more drawn to constructivism because I see the importance of giving students opportunities to create their own work to show what they have learned. Giving students the opportunity to collaborate with peers on their work also contributes to a positive learning experience.

I found the documentary *TEACH* to have a profound affect on my philosophy. It made me realize that not every first-year teacher is going to make it through their first year of teaching without any issues. Just like my own struggles in school, as a future teacher I need to understand that it is going to be a lot of work and at times it is going to feel like I am not as successful as I once hoped I was going to be, but in the long run it will all be worth it when I see successful works my students are creating, when I see students reading books based on historical events that I recommended, when I see students enjoying their time in my classroom I can know that I am doing something right and that I have something to be proud of. In *Teaching Hope*, I got the opportunity to read about different hardships that teachers faced in their careers, some issues that I couldn't fathom seeing in my lifetime just because I have never experienced anything outside of the Maine school system. I have never been aware of any of my classmates wanting to physically or emotionally punish themselves, I have never been a part of a gang, or even seen what one looks like outside of what I see on video, but those are both very true and very real things in the world today and it is something that I need to prepare for. *Teaching Hope* showed me the importance of listening to what your students are *actually* saying, maybe not through their words but through their actions and expressions. I now see the importance of having students keep journals because they might not necessarily feel comfortable approaching me in person, but they could write pages of their troubles and I need to be open to reading them if the student would like me too.

As a history minor I really enjoyed viewing the *Story of Schools* videos by PBS. I think it is important to be aware of the history of education and how far it had come in the United States. By looking back on both the success and mistakes made in the educational system over the past century we can look to fix our own problems that arise. We have gone from one-roomed schoolhouses, to large facilities in which students have access to tools and resources to help improve learning, but we still have a long way to go. The educational system will always be changing, and over the next few years I can become a part of the changes it experiences, and hopefully I can be the change in my own classroom that I want to see.

The physical layout of my classroom will be comfortable and open, allowing for debates, discussions, group work, and activities to be able to coincide at different points throughout the year. I want to avoid giving tests to my students on paper as much as possible. I believe that there are plenty of different successful ways to assess students’ growth in the classroom through their work and participation in class. I want the focus of my classroom to be on the students, not on myself as the teacher, I am there simply to guide students in the right direction during their learning. I want to equip students with the knowledge, tools, and skills to be successful as a learner in and outside of the classroom. I want to be involved in the community, displaying my students work as something they can be proud of, and making sure my students get opportunities to get recognized on their good works and merits.

When I approach teaching as a professional career I will be able to look back on my own education and see what worked and what did not work for me as a student. I will be able to change the things that I did not enjoy during my classroom experiences. I can look at the mistakes that I made as a student and I can push my students not to make those same mistakes. I have chosen teaching because it has been apart of my life since I was born. Having a mother for a teacher, spending time with her in her classroom and seeing her enjoyment always fascinated me. I made strong connections and bonds with a few of my teachers throughout my education that inspired me to turn to teaching as a profession. A superior teacher can be categorized as being kind and enthusiastic about the subject they teach. They need to enjoy learning because it is their job to show students the importance of learning and having an education. I plan on showing my students how much I enjoy the subjects of social studies as soon as they walk in my classroom. From the layout of the room to the decorations on the wall, I want them to see the passion that I have to be a teacher.

I hope that I will continue to learn once I become a teacher, I hope that I am able to have fun with my career because it is what I really want to do. I want students to leave my room feeling like they have actually understood what I have taught them and for them to appreciate the knowledge and use it in their own lives. I hope to contribute passion and youth to the profession. I want to join organizations and attend conferences in which I can continue to expand my teaching knowledge and skills. Looking back on my education as a whole, I again return to the same verse of scripture in the book of Matthew from the Bible; When I needed help and was comfortable enough to ask for it, it was given to me, by my parents, friends, and importantly my teachers. When I sought out to find my purpose at UMF and who I wanted to be as a teacher, I found my learning experiences, my struggles, and how those made me a stronger, more caring person. When I found myself afraid of failure and with nowhere to go, there was always a door I could knock on, or one that was already opened, and support would be waiting on the other side. As a future teacher I will carry this all with me, as something I can turn to and remember, that way when students just like me who need help, but don't know where else to turn, I will be there for them.